

Wycombe Wanderers 0, Barnet 0

UNDERHILL will be no place for the weak-hearted if tonight's (Tuesday) replay matches anywhere near up to Saturday's unrelenting power struggle between Isthmian League fury and Southern League professionalism.

Before a bulging Loakes Park crowd, Wanderers and Barnet got nowhere fast. But they packed 90 minutes' worth of true, cold-blooded cup-tie soccer into getting there.

Barnet refused to adopt the expected packed-defence tactics which could have killed the afternoon stone dead.

They absorbed everything as Wanderers took the game to them non-stop, then flung it back in their faces with a trick-filled period of pressure which brought the very best from John Maskell.

And there to watch the Wycombe goalkeeper leap, dive, twist and turn Barnet away, were Sir Stanley Rous, President of F.I.F.F.A., and Charles Hughes, team boss of England's amateur international squad.

Also on show, John Delaney gave a massive hint that Mr. Hughes should never have dropped him from the reckoning against the Spaniards, although it was Keith Stephenson who on the day outshone all other defenders, Wycombe or Barnet.

Playing with a painful back injury strapped up, Stephenson offset a shaky first quarter to partner Delaney in grand fashion once Wanderers' forwards had tired and Barnet were surging back over the half-way line.

Yes, it was blood, thunder and very nearly a lightning goal, as Barry Baker lobbed a seemingly harmless kick at the visitors' net within seconds of the first whistle. A roar of amazement heralded the opening "score", but the ball had scraped deceptively over, not under the bar, and a goal kick was awarded.

Barnet replied immediately with Adrian Thorne shooting wide from the breakaway, and six minutes later it took quick intervention from Maskell to stop Les Eason punishing a reckless Stephenson back-header.

Wycombe sorely wanted the type of spearheading that Keith Searle, cup-tied from his Wealdstone days, has brought into their league performances of late.

Viv Busby had the beating of centre-half Ben Embury on the ground, but worked best when aiding the home team's build ups in the first 45 minutes.

And, with Geoff Anthony somewhat quieter than was to be hoped, and Tony Horseman hesitating over the half-chances that once he would have turned into certain goals, all Wanderers' pace-setting brought no tangible results.

Still in the seventh minute, Tony darted clear leaving two Barnet defenders adrift. But surprisingly he stopped dead, mis-timed a flick out to Anthony, and generously set up a raid for the visitors.

Busby drew the Barnet back row onto the right after 14 minutes and completed a neat movement by backpassing to Len Worley, who gave Horseman a redeeming pot-shot that could have caused a breakthrough.

But there was always literally a Thorne in Wanderers' side, the Barnet number 11 outpacing Ian Rundle down the left wing time and again, to find or create space galore.

Hampered by a badly bruised foot, Rundle was nowhere to be seen when Thorne moved onto a long cross off the right, to force Maskell into action once more, on 17 minutes.

In mid-period, Barnet were at Barry Baker's mercy but ex-Arsenal and Fulham Jack McLelland parried his kick, after Anthony had flicked the ball sharply into an open space.

Worley, got in on the act in his own right by hopefully scissors-kicking an overhead effort into the top side-netting, and, with Baker sidefooting high from 20 yards and Colin Powell clearing the Barnet line after Horseman had slipped McLelland, the pressure was really on.

The climax came in the final run in to half-time, as Barnet survived a frenzied scramble in their goalmouth. The danger was finally cleared when the ball was cannoned over and out of the ground.

The Southern Leaguers allowed Wanderers meagre breathing space, and drew out every ounce of Isthmian ingenuity.

And the extra effort Wanderers were making began to tell soon into part two.

Despite an Anthony 20-yard shot skimming inches the wrong side of a post, Barnet's forwards had much more to say for themselves, and it became a question of whether Wycombe could last the pace.

The Isthmians' spirit never let them admit that they weren't still playing to win. Yet, in time,

they lost much of their sting and ended up, whether consciously or not, defending for a draw.

Maskell intercepted a cross from Powell with Ricky George moving in menacingly for a header after 67 minutes.

Five minutes later Busby couldn't quite put his head to an Anthony pass, which flew across the goalmouth. And, after another two minutes Wycombe's centre-forward flicked on a shot from Worley, only for McLelland to smother the ball.

So, Wycombe did have something left in reserve; enough at last to beat off Barnet's counter attacks, which often originated from the brain and skill of McLelland's one-time Arsenal colleague, Gerry Ward.

Returning from injury at an appropriate time, Ward provided his Southern League men with the leadership and controlling influence they have been lacking recently.

... which won't make matters any easier for the lads at Underhill!

Wycombe: J. Maskell; I. Rundle, C. Gale; K. Stephenson, J. Delaney, J. Lalley; L. Worley, B. Baker, V. Busby, A. Horseman, G. Anthony, sub: V. Faulkner (not used).

Barnet: J. McLelland; J. Lye, P. Jenkins; G. Ward, B. Embury, B. King; C. Powell, W. Meadows, R. George, L. Eason. Sub: A. Gregory (not used).

Official attendance: 4,200.